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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



The

Banquet: Songs of Evolution



By
Frank
Putnam



The Blakely Press



Chicago

1897

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By FRANK ARTHUR PUTNAM.

TO MARY AGATHA PUTNAM

ADVERTISEMENT

This small volume is the third in a series of books privately printed by the undersigned. The list to-day comprises:

“MEMORIES AND IMPRESSIONS,” 80 pp., in an edition of 300 copies, numbered and signed in autograph. Twenty copies for sale at \$1.

“SONGS OF THE CEDAR,” 16 pp., 100 copies, numbered and signed in autograph. All sold.

“THE BANQUET: SONGS OF EVOLUTION,” 40 pp., 200 copies, numbered and signed in autograph. One hundred copies for sale at \$1.

The fourth volume, to issue during 1898, will be a collection of love songs, under the title, “LOVE LYRICS.”

October 30, 1897.

PREFACE

I know little or nothing of the literature of evolution, so it may be I presume too far in designating the simple verses in this volume "Songs of Evolution." In the main they present those phases of human development which I have observed at first hand while passing a little way through the world.

Lacking other religion, or failing to see in any of the established religions the essentials of spiritual satisfaction, I have taken for my religion evolution as I understand it.

With the assurance of sincerity, tempered somewhat by the humility of conscious inadequacy, I present to my friends this further evidence of desire for their esteem.

Frank Putnam

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THE BANQUET

On this night in the dusk of my innermost chamber
A reception is holden—come in, you were bidden;
In the contact of spirit and flesh I salute you.

You are welcome, you brother, you sister, none alien;
Whether virgin or scarlet, no matter, I love you.

You that haughtily halt at the doorway awaiting
Special sign, do you dream I will meet you with fawning?
Do you fancy the glitter of wealth or of station,
Or the fame universal whose halo proclaims you,
Will impel me to set you apart from these others?

For an answer I raise up this wretch from the gutter,
Him I heartily clasp with the grip of affection.

Yea, depart if it please you, contemptuous, (I care not).
To the scenes of despicable triumphs returning;
We shall surely make merry this evening without you.

Does it seem to you, friends, that my chamber is narrow
For the multitude thronging the hallway, approaching?
Never fear; we shall find it commodious, sufficient:
To the right, to the left, there is room for all comers.

You that slave in the sun that another may pluck you,—
You that sigh in the Shadows of Silence, cease, enter,—
To the Banquet of Love in my heart I invite you.



THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Do the tears that arise in the heat of the strife
Seem to hide from your vision the purpose of life?
Do the myriad cares of laborious days
Leave a doubt in your heart whether living them pays?

Banish doubt and plod on. Life was given to man
As a part of Creation's mysterious plan;
Each must carry what burdens the years may bestow
Until burdens and bearers alike are laid low.

At the end of the road is a couch with a pall,
And it may be the couch is the end of it all;
Or it may be the spirit, released from the clod,
Shares the freedom of Time with the infinite God.

'Tis but folly to dig into moss-covered creeds;
Let your life be a record of generous deeds.
Not the wisest may fathom Futurity's plan,
But the weakest may live as becometh a man.



MAN AND HIS HOME

To-day I heard one say:

“Ah well, the earth is grey;

“On all we see arrayed
The chill of age is laid;

‘Soon man and this his floor
Shall pass and none deplore.

“Flower and bird and tree;
The valley, hill and sea;

“Mountain and plain—all, all
Move to Oblivion's pall.

“Daily we see revealed
The hearts of humans, steeled,

“Stubbornly crying ‘Nay!’
Where weaker humans pray

“For but a slender share
Of that the soul deems fair.

“India's millions gaunt,
Born into life-long want,

“Up-turn fanatic eyes
Unto the barren skies,

“Pleading before a God
Whose answer is the rod.

“Here, where fierce war decreed
The black forever freed,

“White slaves, bereft of hope,
Through saddened seasons grope,

“Weary of heart and brain;
Tools for another’s gain,

“Broken and cast aside.
Only the grave can hide

“Safely from mortal ken
The piteous lives of men;

“Only in earth’s arms deep
May these, the toilers, sleep.

“’Tis well the end draws near
When over all the sphere

“Is neither joy nor pain,
But Death’s benignant reign.”

* * * * *

Hope never seems so sweet
As when she heals defeat.

The world may wear an air
Of weariness and care,

Injustice rule the hearts,
Dishonesty the marts,

Gold be the present test
’Twixt damned and doubly blest,—

These are the faults of old;
The tale is not all told.

These are the ancient sins;
Ere history begins

Anger and Greed and Lust
Sprang from the primal dust.

Onward without a pause,
Controlled by Nature’s laws,—

Onward and upward, man,
Creature of Nature’s plan,

Steadily, surely gains
The path to nobler planes.

In dark, unwritten years
Men rose from lower spheres;

So ever shall they rise,
Each one that lives and dies,

Whether again he lives
Or if he, dying, gives

Back to the boundless whole
His disembodied soul,

By something gained in grace
Has helped advance the race.

Preacher, or fool, or knave,
Sulker or soldier brave,—

No life so small, so mean,
But secretly, unseen,

Somewhere, somehow inspires
Love's purifying fires.

This earth of ours is young!
The Hand that lightly flung

Upon its vacant shore
The seeds of life which bore

Fruitage of cell and sense
Was of Omnipotence.

He whose mysterious will
We helplessly fulfill,—

Did He but jest, indeed,
What time He sowed the seed?

Thrice blind, who will not know,
What do the ages show?

Growth! ever the purer life;
Ever the less of strife;

Ever the broader view
Of brothers' mutual due.

And though the gain be slow,
Man and his home shall grow
Under the Master's hand
Into the life He planned.
Weary and far the way:
Glorious the perfect day.



MAN AND THE LAW

The Law is God. The blind that kneel
To Deity appealing
May find within
A cure for sin
Beyond the sky's revealing.

The weed that grows unchecked beside
The loveliest of roses,—
Jewel and clod,—
Each shelters God,
As each the Law discloses.

What is the Law? No person knows,—
Or none among the living;
The righteous swell
With threats of hell,
But sinners preach forgiving.

Preachers agree that life endures
Beyond Death's gloomy visit,
But disagree
Like thieves at sea
Upon this point: what is it?

Whether the You and I shall cross,
Unchanged, the misty border;
Or whether then
The souls of men
Shall grace a higher order;

Or whether that we know as Death
Completes a soul's endeavor,

Closing its page
With joy or rage
Forever and forever,—
Scattering wide the thoughts which were
The I that once had being;
Unyoking dire
And pure desire,
Each from the other freeing:
These they debate, with deadly hate
The ranks of men dividing;
But never one,
Whose life is done
Sends good or evil tiding.
Prophets arise, in varying modes
Time-proven truths applying;
Each says his creed
Is what men need,—
That all the rest were lying.
Let us suppose the Law is Love
And Love the highest duty;
So shall the race
Attain the grace
Of Purity and Beauty.
Suppose that Death blots out the I,
Were life the less worth living?—
All good survives,
To later lives
An upward impulse giving.
The task is God's—all time is His,
Mine but the season flying;
Joy is the prize
Wherefor my eyes
Seek, and my year is dying.
For what He wills He has no need,
No urgency requiring
That You and I
Should tarry by
Whenas we've been expiring.

Why,'twere as if the workman's tools
He flings aside for breaking,
Fresh aid advance,
In ignorance
That other tools are making.

Enough for me if I may pass
With little for regretting,
At peace to lie
Beneath the sky,
Forgotten and forgetting.



BROTHERHOOD

Alone at the window I sit,
Dreamily, over the street,—
Careless how moments may flit,—
Feeling the solitude sweet.

Melody breaths in the air;
Cometh on mist-haloed wings
Visions of children at prayer
And of one that exultantly sings.

Silence is over it all;
Yet doth the melody swell,
Holding my spirit in thrall
To the sonorous song of the knell.

Up through the street in the gloom
A funeral cortege comes;
The surf sends an echoing boom
Like the thunderous rumble of drums.

There is joy in its dominant note,
And a minor of pain;
There's a sob in my throat,
And my tears are like rain.

* * * * *

O, feeling that binds us as one
In a brotherhood vast!
When for each life is finally done
And his plume-covered carriage moves past,

Some one, surely, shall pause to behold,
And, there seeing the fruit of the years,
Shall be bowed in his soul as of old
By a prayer that is quickened with tears.



A CRY IN THE DARKNESS

Against the bars of blindness beating,
Entrapped for Time's eternal day,
By neither life nor death completing
Toil's ceaseless round, we keep the way.

O life, O love, O deathless yearning!—
'Mid fearful gloom we walk alone.
From dust up-sprung, to dust returning,—
Thou God! when shall Thy will be known?



NOT ALL A WEARY WAY

This life's a weary way, my babes,—
A long and weary way;
Cares wake with morn and hover near
Throughout the livelong day;
And oft, when thou art wrapt in sleep,
Cares still their tedious vigils keep.

Out of the all-surrounding gloom
The gray years come and go;
Silent they pass nor ever hear
The voice of mortal woe;
And all the store of gifts they bring
Before the happy few they fling.

These lightly sing and gaily hail
This world all flowery fair;
For them its hours are rich with sweets
And Mirth the king of Care.
But O, the poor, who dare not play,—
They find life's road a weary way.

The many bide in want, my babes,
Though joy seems meant for all;
In vain they call on God for aid,
He does not heed their call.
Perhaps the Master wills that man
Himself shall frame a fairer plan.

Were toil sole price of mortal life
It were not dearly bought;
Toil is, indeed, a solace dear
For what we've vainly sought;
While labor holds the thoughts in thrall
Souls cease to hear their longings call.

We may not know by what a plan
The Master holds His sway;
We only know that joys and griefs
Alternate rule our day,—
That each, his purpose to fulfill,
Must bow to the Eternal Will.

Wherefore do thou rejoice, my babes,
Ere youthful days depart;
Too soon the solemn years will cast
A shadow in each heart.
Praise God thou know'st it not to-day
How life shall prove a weary way.

And yet not all a weary way,—
Some long-forgotten strain
Of springtime's music echoes back
And makes us glad again;
Sometimes wafts back to age's hours
The fragrant breath of springtime's flowers.

PROGRESS

Since Epictetus spread the rays
Of Reason's lamp around,
The human race, by stony ways,
Has moved to higher ground.

That time the lauded attribute
Was courage to endure;
To-day's evangels substitute
An inquiry and cure.

When Arrianus' pencil caught
The master sage's speech,
He felt that biting, pungent thought
All time the truth would teach.

Here—here, he said, was logic's end,—
Life's ultimate decree;
Statutes the years could not amend
Through all eternity.

So deemed each one whose brain defined
A nobler moral code;
But lo! the years left all behind,
Debris beside the road.

Left all behind? Well, hardly all;
Rather from each they took
What living brands old creeds let fall
And all the dead forsook.

And so to-day the ardent souls
That preach the latest creed
Are very sure their scheme controls
The race's final need.

Enthusiastic, unafraid,
Combative men are these,
Spreading the word, in faith arrayed,
Beyond the farthest seas.

I would not by or speech or pen
Their glorious zeal abate

Whose lives of love proclaim to men
The mockery of hate.

And yet—and yet—time's teachings show
Some day beneath the sun
A fairer plan than aught we know
Will prove Christ's labor done.

Not soon,—the long, long years will fade
Ere that consummate hour
When every human heart is made
To feel the Martyr's power.

But in some period, distant, dim,
The eyes of man shall read
The Perfect Purpose writ by Him
Who scattered here the seed.



IN THE GREEN OF OUR LEAF

Lo, the race marches on to the measure
Of the music that swells through the spheres;
Gone, gone is the Goddess of Pleasure,
With her trappings of poisonous treasure,
To the graves of dead years.

Lust was queen at time's morn for an hour
In lascivious splendor supreme;
Love has brought us a worthier dower,
And she leads us with tenderer power
To a knightlier theme.

Love calls and the listening nations
Learn the truth from her clarion voice;
Ardent souls in all civilizations
Shall redeem us through Love's ministrations
Till all mortals rejoice.

Having Youth with its promise of gladness,
Facing Age with its menace of grief,
It were folly suppler than madness
Did we dully cohabit with Sadness
In the green of our leaf.

What is life and what death and what sorrow
That the heart of a man should bemoan?
Have we Now and still eager to borrow?
Live to-day!—let Oblivion's to-morrow
Have a care for its own.

What is fame that ambition, desiring
Its approval, should sacrifice all?
Unto Love (with nor doubting nor tiring,
As the crown of all glory) aspiring,
Let us march to the pall.

Love for all of humanity's creatures!—
Yea, a love that is proof against fears;
So our thoughts that survive shall be teachers
And our deeds be the text of Love's preachers
Through the infinite years.



SWEET IS THY LAW

Sweet is Thy law, O God!
Destiny's fullness is thine;
Infinite time shall men plod,
Infinite longings resign.

Weary and far is the way,
Heavy the burdens borne;
Sorrow shall rule by day,
Grief shall abide till morn.

Like to the coral isles
Building beneath the sea,
Toiling o'er life's long miles,
Servants of Thine are we.

Temples of living grace
Rearing by grain on grain:
Ultimate joy for the race,
Ours but the toil and pain.

Sweet is Thy law, but O,
Dearer is death than birth;
Hearts shall forget their woe
Deep in the silent earth.

GOD IN THE WOODS

It seems long years,—it is but days,—
Since, wandering on in lonely ways,
I strove to send my spirit's gaze

Beyond the misty morrow.
Forgot the grove's inspiring shade,
Forgot the gifts of God displayed
With lavish love; in grey arrayed,
I found no mate but Sorrow.

“Ah! what,” I asked, “will be the end?
What purpose did the Lord intend
In making mortal weakness blend
With more than mortal longing?
Shall we forever run the round
Of in and out the common ground,
Or some time be an exit found
With souls immortal thronging?

“Are Life and Death, the brothers grim,
Flung forward by the hand of Him
At Time's first awful morning dim,
The sum of our requiting?
Is there no day of splendid grace,
No vale in all the realms of space
Where He must meet us face to face
The wrongs of ages righting?

“Are Faith's alluring rays that stream
Across our pathway what they seem
Or phantoms of a world-wide dream,
The eyes of men deceiving?”
Ever and ever the prayer ascends,—
The heathen's with the adept's blends,—
For news of what the Law portends
Of gladness or of grieving.

Amid the city's rush and roar,
Where human driftwood strews the shore
And Sorrow's cries to heaven soar,
For dear Oblivion yearning,—

The man of quick and generous mind,
Whose love includes all human kind,
How often shall he look to find
 The world its wounded spurning!

Where Want upon her wasted breast
Her famished infant lulls to rest,
Or counts it, dying, early blest,
 Life's bitter woes evading,
Presumptuous Wealth, with haughty eye,
A nameless ant beneath the sky,
In minioned state rolls lightly by,
 Her pride of place parading.

What wonder then if Doubt obtain
Dominion in the saddened brain
And Hope give way to hopeless Pain,
 The spirit acquiescing?
Did God such sorry creatures frame
And their immortal life proclaim
To trample on His holy name
 Their mutual hate confessing?

May men to such a boon aspire
Who grovel in the sordid mire
Of Lust's insatiable desire,
 The bonds of Love denying?
I ask in vain, these streets of stone
Ignore alike the laugh and moan
Of Wealth and Want. I walk alone
 Within the shadow, sighing.

Too much depressed by mingled woe
And hatred of the urban show
I turn where Cedar's waters flow
 Through fairy forests singing.
At ease upon a shady knoll
I scan God's panoramic scroll,
The sighs of mortals from my soul,
 A needless burden, flinging.

Again for me the earth is fair,
For me the winged flowers of air
Banish with song the ghosts of Care,
 "Be glad!" "Be glad!" repeating.
No more need I night's tapers burn,
Toiling in ancient tomes to learn
That truth of truths the birds discern,
 The morn with music meeting.

The cooling breezes, pipes of Pan,
The calm that heals the heart of man,
Proclaim the All-Creator's plan,
 The ends of Reason serving.
I look along the forward way
And see the race to Wisdom's day,
Beneath the Lord's benignant sway,
 Advancing, never swerving.

I walk along the Cedar's banks,
Where stately trees in open ranks
With heads unbared give silent thanks
 For life, the gift supernal.
Reverent I stand in Nature's hall,
I hear the voice of Nature call
And need not ask if this be all,
 Or if life be eternal.



TO A CHILD

The years stretch far before thee,
Thy past is but a day;
Fair skies of Hope spread o'er thee,
Love watches by the way.

As closely now I hold thee,
Safe in a father's arms,
So may my prayers enfold thee
Ever through life's alarms.

The tasks of Duty call thee,—
Youth has not long to dream;
In whatsoe'er befall thee
Be thou the man thou seem.

Hypocrisy will try thee
With promises that shine,
But keep thou Honor by thee
And happiness is thine.

The gauds of life may pass thee
And lowly be thy lot;
The pen of Time may class thee
With mortals soon forgot;

Grim Toil may long enslave thee
Ere Nature claim her debt,
But He, thy God, who gave thee
His work, will not forget.



THROUGH THE SPIRIT'S CALM EYES

Men are sick with unsatisfied yearning,
They are chilled by the shadow of fear;
They would learn what is past human learning
Ere the dusk of their day shall appear;
So with prayers that are ever returning
Unappeased from Vacuity's ear,
Or with logic high heaven assailing
In a quest that is vain, unavailing,
They are borne to the bier.

Earth but serves for humanity's training,
'Tis the path of the race, not its goal;
Through the years nobler attributes gaining,
Individuals leaven the whole;
Love eternal, her kingdom attaining,
Shall perfect us from pole unto pole.
Though earth die when its mission be ended,
Yet the spirit of man shall be blended
With the Infinite Soul.

At the end of all lusts, of all laughter,
At the end of all moans and all sighs
Of our sons and all men who come after,—
When the earth wanders cold in the skies,
Or, bereft of what destinies waft her,
On the floor of the universe lies,—
We shall see, being healed of our blindness,
The mysterious ways of God's kindness
Through the spirit's calm eyes.



SILENCE AND DREAMS

Silence and dreams * * * If a man's heart cry,
Wrung by the torture of world-old fears;
"Death after life! Shall my spirit die?—
Wasted all waiting, all toil, all tears?"
Beckon him then where Hope's fountain streams,
Deep in the valley of silence and dreams.

Silence and dreams * * * O, the vale is fair;
Gladness is over it all life long.
Sorrow comes never, nor ever Despair;
Faith is its ruler, and right or wrong,
Always Faith's guidance a solace seems,
Down in the valley of silence and dreams.

Silence and dreams * * * We desire no more;
Green overhead of the mingled trees;
Children at play by a cottage door;
Laughter that sings on the passing breeze;
Love that is lit by eternal beams,—
Home in the valley of silence and dreams.



THE INDIVIDUAL

Look neither down nor up, my friend, to vice or virtue
find;
For signs of growth look neither before you nor behind.
Lo, every earthly mortal unconsciously within,
Gives room to every virtue and room to every sin.

IN THE DAY OF DEMOCRACY

Have you hate in your heart for a mortal, my brother?

Do you envy the victors the crowns they have won?
Time will show you all mortals made one with each
other

In the day when the will of Democracy's done.

In the day when the will of Democracy's done

You and I, in the dust of dead centuries sleeping,
Will be there in the person of daughter or son,
All the fruits of our earlier sacrifice reaping.

All the fruits of our earlier sacrifice reaping,—

In the ultimate hour possessed of our own;
For the God of Creation has man in His keeping.
And be sure we shall reap from the seeds we have
sown.



SACRIFICE

He who for an immortal life adopts a mortal creed
Proclaims alone the littleness of egotistic greed.

Enough it is, as sure it is, that ere I reach my goal,
Some deed of mine shall glorify the universal soul.

Light! give us light, that we may know the grandeur
of the plan

Wherein all seen and unseen growths are common heir
with man.

This blade of grass whereon of late some careless passer
trod,

Is flesh of mine and soul of mine and part with me of
God.

The witless scoff, the wilful blind fling maledictions
wide,

But Truth triumphant keeps the way with unimpeded
stride.

Time proves all things, defines all things, assort, accepts,
rejects;

The years a single sermon preach, with sacrifice the
text.

O man, O woman, heed ye not the anguish of the rod,
But learn the bliss of sacrifice, that proves the man a
god.



OF A DAY THAT IS DAWNING

There was never a mortal yearning for the life that is
yet to be,

There was never a supplication arose to the silent sky,
But the essence of God was in it,—the spirit of land and
sea,—

The divinely spoken assurance that nothing can ever
die.

There was never a mortal yearning but it rose from the
hidden springs

In the heart of the All-Creator, the ruler of time and
space;

And the cry of the blindest human for the bliss of the
future rings

Increasingly up the ages, the path of the rising race.

There was never a supplication that sprang from the
lips of man

But it told of the leaven working in the vessel of
pregnant clay;

And in none of the younger epochs since the rise of the
race began

Has the passion of men so centered on the ultimate
perfect day.

I perceive that the schemes you follow are many and ill
agree;

That you pause in the joy of living to throttle and
scourge and maim,

To the end that your stubborn brothers shall see as the
Faithful see,

And shall humble themselves at the altar of the God
of an empty name.

Though the law is as music in silence or a mountain
alone in a plain,

Man has gleaned of its glorious message but an in-
finitesimal trace;

After numberless centuries pleading for impossible
personal gain,

He shall quit toil at even rejoicing in the grave's
inexpressible grace.

Not the pangs that we name dissolution, nor the shadow
of infinite woe

Shall forever conceal from his vision the fact that the
race ascends

In the multiple lives of its units;—he shall see and be
happy to go

Where the individual impulse with the source of its
being blends.



FERTILE GARDENS FAIR

I would not, had I power, rend
The rock whereon you cling;
I know the years that onward tend
A common future bring.

Life's day is brief, by hope relieved,
Men calmly face the night;
Years hence our sons, not now conceived,
Will see with clearer sight.

Men live and love and hope inspires
The thought audacious, vain,
That far amid ethereal choirs
The I shall live again.

No debt they own to Mother Earth,
No debt to brother man;
Ignored the seed that gave them birth,
Ignored Creation's plan.

They prate of souls as facts above
Mere nerve and blood and bone,—

As heirs of God's eternal love,
Predestined to a throne.

A fair half truth,—no more, no less,—
That bounds the age's view;
Eons to come will prove, I guess,
All this and more is true.

I guess that some time mortal sense,
Expanding hour by hour,
Will grasp the vast magnificence
Of man's supernal dower.

These fleshly frames that mortals wear,
Of pains and blisses wrought,
Are even as fertile gardens fair
Whence spring the flowers of thought.

I guess that we are but the type
Of all creation's scheme,
Mere trivial parts of works unripe,—
Blind followers of a dream.

He knew whose wondrous plan we read
The power of dear desire,
And planted deep in every seed
The one command: "Aspire!"

Creation climbs, the way is long;
Upon itself it feeds,
And ever and ever outgrows the wrong
Of individual greeds.

The I, inspired by love, discerns
At length the nobler aim,
Abandons greed and proudly spurns
Its old presumptuous claim.

Thereafter all its service tends
Toward the common weal;
Its deeds, however obscure their ends,
Immortal love reveal.

The mass as yet in darkness bides,
But ever and ever the sun
Of Reason higher in heaven rides,
And slowly, one by one,

Keen individuals, joyous, see
And call to them behind.
Their sign is not for you and me,
The weak or willful blind;

The word they speak our sons shall hear,
In them its flower expand;
So ever and ever the race draws near
To what the Maker planned.

Dream on, my friend, no word I write
Disturb your calm repose;
Man's fortune mounts from height to height,
Truth's tide eternal flows.



AN ARMY ON THE WAY

The race is but an army on the way
From primal Night to Truth's eternal Day.
The journey done, we'll dwell together long
As brothers under Love's benignant sway.

In every corps one holds supreme command,
Commissioned from the All-Creator's hand,
Assumes the air and station of a god,
And leaves a gospel regnant in the land.

Each mighty leader all the rest denies,
Yet each proclaims the Spirit of the Skies,
Rewards with hope the multitude behind
And frowns upon the prematurely wise.

To each in turn the God enough reveals
To serve a little time, the rest conceals,
In tender mercy answers not at all
Presumptuous man's perpetual appeals.

Deluded aye, each solemn zealot peers
Adown the crowded pathway of the years
And prophesies for pleasure taken now
A limitless futurity of tears.

The God of All is good; He doth decree
Immortal life divine for you and me;
The law is writ in living letters large
Alike upon the continent and sea.

I love you all, Mohammedan or Jew,—
Whoever says his creed alone is true,—
For we are way-worn comrades and I go
To share a splendid destiny with you.









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